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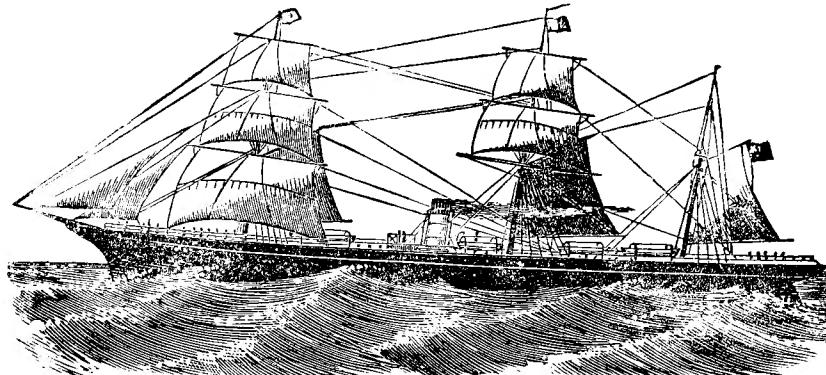
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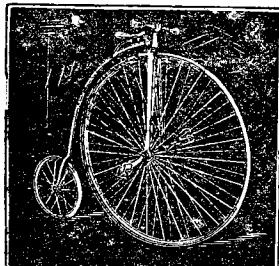
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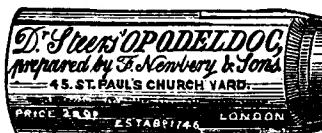
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THE ANNUAL FREE-AND-EASY IN THE GILT-HALL DINING ROOM:—BEN CHANGES THE MOTTO.

BEN CHANGES THE MOTTO

A SEQUEL TO
THE "BLOT ON THE QUEEN'S HEAD"



I.

THREE years had gone by since our friend, the daring and in-

genious Ben, the head-waiter, had altered the sign that swung over the door of the old Queen's Head Inn. There, still plain to all beholders, was the *blot* upon the crown, but time and dust had done something, and people now hardly noticed Ben's handiwork. It had served its turn in creating a nine days' wonder, and in giving Ben notoriety, but folks generally had ceased thinking or talking about it. Besides, it was Ben's nature not to be satisfied with one surprise, and he had many startling wonders yet in store for the world.

Great changes had been made in the establishment. Had the old waiters Peel and Pam come to life again they would never have known the old place. Ben was not a man to allow himself to be checked by rules and regulations, though he affected to be of a good old-fashioned conservative character. We said the custom of the house was to consult the inmates regularly about the management and expenses, and report the results to the manageress, who, if she liked the suggestions (and she generally found it best to do so), agreed to them, and ordered things to be done accordingly. Ben, however, had rather a supreme scorn of the opinions and humours of the guests. He looked upon them as a set of duffers, always trying to get the best of the management and reduce the powers of the manageress. He resolved to try and limit this sort of thing. He had already put her up several pegs, he said, by his late manœuvres, and he meant to keep her there. She stayed a good deal in her room, being busy, and perhaps a little weary; but he used her authority pretty freely. Big Bill and Strong-and-Hearty were ashamed of the way in which her name was bandied about, even among the potboys, and they kicked up a row about

it in the bar-room, but then the bar-room was now always filled with Ben's friends, and they would swear "black was white" if he told them the good lady of the house wished it. There was a little page, by the way, a smart little fellow too, and very well liked on all sides, but as dangerous a little rascal as ever trod shoe-leather, who used to go about whispering and offering things amongst the men—they called him Hearty Dick because he was always so cordial. And as Staffy had the till, and could tip all round pretty freely, you can fancy how strong the Ben party was.

The long-established system of overhauling bills and accounts in open bar was Ben's detestation. Clever and dashing managers never like to have their expenditure criticised. The fact was when he was bar-keeper the bills didn't bear looking into, especially a lot of expenses he had incurred in the row with a small rubbishy inn called the "Abyssinian." Ben had sworn the lawyers' bills "didn't exceed five hundred pun'," whereas after Big Bill came in as head-waiter he found they were over nine hundred. In fact, accounts were not Ben's *forte*, and he had to make up for his weakness in that department by brag and show and flummery. Of these he could get up an unlimited supply—it was in his line, having come out of the property business. But he and Staffy put their heads together and resolved never to let any one know what was being spent until it was spent. On such a system of finance as that the Queen's Head or any other inn might get into bankruptcy before any one suspected it.

As his idea was to make a big show and advertise freely, he determined to renew the place and all the furniture and utensils, &c., and get everything into prime order.

He swore that Big Bill and his friends, when they were in charge, had allowed everything to go to rack and ruin. So he went in for spending a good deal of money. Old-fashioned gentlemen, who had become used to the steady quiet of the Inn, were now worried by the continual bustle. You couldn't sleep in the morning. You couldn't get a quiet chair in the coffee-room. Windows were open—draughts were blowing, chambermaids with mops, and painters with brushes, and sooty chimney-sweepers, and noisy carpenters and joiners and carpet-layers were running and working all over the place. Vulgar changes were the order of the day. Inside and out “repairs” were everlastingly going on—ceilings plastered and gilded, rooms repapered and painted in strange colours (in the Queen Anne's style), immense sums of money spent in new kitchen utensils, crockery, silver, napery, tubs, and Heaven knows what not. Ben even founded a new class of waiters and chambermaids, attached to the Imperial Hindoo wing, and dressed in very gorgeous liveries, with any amount of jewelry.

Not content with this, Little Ben took on new airs. He got the manageress to change his name from Ben the head-waiter to “Monsieur Ben-jingo,” the *maître d'hôtel*—they called it Mounseer. He said it was necessary “to show the other hotels that we were quite up to them in point of style and dignity.” So he wore a great cocked hat and carried a stick with a gilt head. It was beautiful to see his airs. He took the manageress quite under his protection.

This was the state of things in the new hotel, under its new head-waiter. Big Bill turned up his nose and went about with a whisk, raising a dust wherever he found it



II.

MEANWHILE trouble was brewing. One of the worst managed inns ever seen in the world was "The Crescent," a vast, remarkable place, of ancient opulence and splendour,

but greatly reduced through the extravagance and folly of the owners. From being a first-class place of its sort, though always noted for the corruption and thievery of its waiters, it had dwindled down to a wretched fifth-rate boarding-house, frequented by all sorts of people of the worst character, some of them known as Levantines. The Crescent had long been famed for its Sublime Porte, as the big gate-entrance was called. This house was a standing nuisance to all its neighbours. In its wretchedly-furnished rooms, it was darkly whispered, every crime was committed. Shrieks were heard there at night, fires broke out, robberies were frequent, people were afraid of their lives to stay there. Throughout the management was diabolical. For want of better accommodation a lot of people called Slavs used to put up there, and having got under the thumb of the manager were forced to stay there, taking anything they could get. These poor creatures, quiet and stupid enough, were really driven almost to their wits' end by cruelty and starvation, and some of them had even mutinied and shut themselves up in their rooms, and defied the feeble fool who had succeeded to the lease of the hotel. The windows of the Imperial Bear opened over some portion of the Crescent yard and a vast pond which lay between the two properties. The inmates of the Big Bear could hear the shrieks and shouts of the poor people in the Crescent, and said it was more than flesh and blood could stand, and that they would *not* stand it.

One day, in a courtyard called Bosnia, a shindy broke out, the noise of which could be heard even in the Queen's Head. People stuck their heads out of the windows in alarm. All the managers ran out and sent messengers to

learn what was happening. The old gentlemen in the coffee - room dropped their newspapers and swore “this sort of thing couldn’t be permitted to go on any longer.”

The managers of the Imperial Bear, the Imperial Eagle, and the Imperial-Eagle-with-two-Heads were old friends, connected by marriage and by their methods of business. They conducted their hotels in the good old-fashioned style, flashy and expensive in the best rooms, and dirty and squalid in the attics and cellars, doing as they chose, and making all the money they could, with very little regard to the interest of the guests. They had, as we said before, always looked rather superciliously at the new-fangled way of doing business “in a popular fashion” at the Frog Hotel and Queen’s Head.

Mister Alick, of the Imperial Bear, a fine old fellow of a serious and even religious disposition, though, by the way, he never stood any impertinence from his people, but, if they annoyed him, tied them up and thrashed them, or locked them up in the coldest attics of the hotel, and fed them on bread and water, was greatly moved, as all his people were, by the row in the Bosnian court.

“Look here,” he says, “Gortchy”—(an awfully clever *maître d'hôtel* Gortchy)—“look here, Gortchy, my boy, strictly on humanitarian grounds remember, we must go in and stop this. Go and see old Blood-and-Iron and little Andy, and settle what’s to be done. We’ll apply to the police at once, do you hear?”

Blood-and-Iron was the most terrible *maître d'hôtel* in the whole place, strong, big, knowing, swaggering about in grand style, and keeping all the guests and waiters on his premises in perpetual terror, a regular Hausmeister of

the old school. He had studied cooking and managing under an Italian named Machiavelli—not Francatelli by any means—and a devil of a fellow *he* was.

The three *maîtres* met and indited a strongish notice to the Crescent “owners and occupiers.” Then they asked the other managers to sign it.

Mounseer Ben-jingo and his friends didn’t like this interference. However, after swearing at the three *maîtres*, and sending a private note to Old Fezzy of the Crescent, telling him to put down the row quickly himself or he would have the police in, they signed the joint notice “for mere politeness’ sake.” Monsieur Andy undertook to deliver it—and did.

Old Fezzy began to smoke the situation.

“Look here,” he said to himself, “I’ll post some Circassian polishers in those Slav Courts, and they shall drub these noisy rascals into silence. Those Imperial Hotel fellows are jealous of one another, and if I only temporise we shall get them all by the ears before they’ve done.”

He put his finger on his nose and swore (or said piously), “Bismallah!” and smoked a pipe.

Andy’s note to Old Fezzy, therefore, made things worse if anything.

Fresh rows broke out every night. Alick’s people became furious. The three *maîtres* again met, drew up a stronger notice, and invited the rest to sign it.

Then Monsieur Ben-jingo sniffed his nose and said, “I smell a rat behind the arras,” thus mingling, in his well-known style, Shakspearean and vulgar ideas. “We won’t sign this. Those three fellows are in league and assuming to lead the trade. They shan’t do it. Confound them!

they'll be going in presently and seizing half the Crescent Hotel for their own business. Send a body of our men over to watch the Dardanelles passage to the Grand Salon, and tell Old Fezzy to hang on. Salsify, write a strong letter to these gentlemen, and say we will not play second fiddle to them or anybody else, and they're bound by the old agreement we made years ago at the dinner party in the Paris chamber of the Frog Hotel, to let the Crescent alone whatever happens."

This magnificent conduct filled all Mounseer Ben-jingo's party with admiration.

"Hooray!" they cried in the bar-room. "Here's to you, Ben! *You're* the man to keep up the name and honour of the old Inn."

They even chased Big Bill and his friends about, and Strong-and-Hearty and some of the others got alarmed and shut up, though Big Bill never would keep his tongue still. The hotel was filled with noise and enthusiasm. "What a *maître* he is!" cried the waiters. "What a miracle he is!" cried the guests, especially of the lower class.

Mounseer Ben-jingo cleverly fed the excitement.

It was the custom of the time, once a year, to hold a "free-and-easy" in a chamber called the *Gilt-hall*, when the tradesmen to the establishment gave a feed to the principal waiters, the bar-keeper, the chief butler, head-cook, and so forth. There, though, as it afterwards turned out, he actually had in his pocket a kind letter from Mister Alick, of the Imperial Bear, assuring him he only wanted the nuisance in the Crescent abated, Mounseer Ben-jingo between the songs, and I am bound to add after a good deal of lush had been going, made a speech.

"I tell you, gen'lemen," he said, "WE are not going

to let ourselves be outdone by other hotels. I know the tricks Mister Alick and his head man Gortchy are up to—they are going to law with Old Fezzy, and they think they'll wreck him and take his business over at half-price. We won't permit it. We mean to put our foot down, and if they want lawing we'll give them a bellyful. Ours is the richest hotel in the world. We can go on with a lawsuit against all the other hotels together—not for one year, or for two years, but for three years without winking."

He drew himself up in the attitude of an ancient Roman, and all the tradesmen cheered to the echo. What a grand *maitre* he was!





III.

HEN there happened the most awful thing ever known to have occurred in any modern house. One night, when all had gone to bed, and gentle sleep seemed to be settling down upon the inmates of all the buildings and courts, sharp dreadful

shrieks, frightful tumult, and the most horrible curses were heard mingling together in that devil's den, the Crescent Hotel. It curdled the blood to hear it rising in the darkness of the night. What had been done? The Circassian polishers, well armed with knives and bludgeons, had fulfilled their orders. They killed, and maimed, and cut to pieces in a mad fury every one they could find in the Bulgarian court. It was fearful. The bodies of men, women, and children were piled up in the yard, and a fire built round them. The well was choked with corpses. The scene was simply infernal.

Mister Alick and his people woke up in a frenzy.

“In the name of God, go in!” he cried out to his whole staff. “Turn them out!”

And in the name of God they went in—went in over the walls, swarming into the courts, beating down the cowardly murderers, the foul beasts, the brutal servants of Old Fezzy, until at length they actually stormed the main building, and were on the very stairs leading to the Grand Salon, where Fezzy and his friends were huddled together, trembling and swearing. It seemed to be all up with the Sublime Porte.

In the Queen's Head the excitement was tremendous. A number of people went about shrieking that if Monsieur Alick once got into the Grand Salon of the Crescent he would never give it up again. They pointed out that, once there, he might shut up the Crescent minories, and so stop one of the cuts to the Indian wing.

Mounseer Ben-jingo got his private friends together, and though one or two objected, particularly two of the subs., who looked after the outside business and some of the smaller wings of the Queen's Head, he turned them out of

their situations, and frightened the rest into agreeing with him. They demanded in the bar-room a large sum of money to do what they liked with, and gave formal notice to Monsieur Alick that if he entered the Grand Salon they would issue a writ and send their bailiffs into his house at once.

Gortchy was ordered to say that they quite misunderstood his master. He had no designs on the Crescent or the Grand Salon, he only wished to secure the lodgers from Old Fezzy's cruelty and bad temper.

“All bosh!” said Mounseer Ben-jingo. He was sailing along now on the popular current, and did not want things to come to an end in that way.

Upon this Monsieur Alick sent round to Old Fezzy a very cunning fellow named *Churny*—I suppose from his buttermilky nature—and he managed to come to terms with the hoary old sinner:—

1. To give up all the Servian buildings and court.
2. To drop the Montenegrin outhouse.
3. To turn out of all the courts, buildings, &c., except the Grand Salon, and a few small chambers near.
4. To give a right of way through Dardanelles passage.
5. To give up a strong room in the minories and a warehouse, which was almost laying open the Asian wing to Monsieur Alick's mercy, &c., &c., &c.

No doubt these were thundering hard terms. But when they heard of them at the Queen's Head, upstairs and downstairs, and all over the place, the lodgers and waiters became furious, and profane swearing became the order of the day with the most pious people.

“What! let Mounseer Alick take over all that! Pshaw! he pretends it is to establish new inns under entirely separate

and independent management, but of course they will all be under his thumb. Why, our Hindoo business will be ruined ! Next thing he'll be going into our Hindoo Empress Hotel"—which was miles and miles off from the Crescent and all its courts, as Salsify had once pointed out, with his finger on a big plan.

There seemed to be what is called the devil to pay. Heady *shrieked* with rage, and Salsify, now the new outdoor manager, wrote a long letter and a very clever one, pointing out that Monsieur Alick was coming it rather too strong, and that he was breaking what he called "the old trade contract and understanding." He was very fine indeed on the topic of trade union now, although before, as we have seen, when the three *maîtres* proposed a joint action, the Imperial management would have nothing to do with it. However, you can't always be consistent and honest in the hotel business, or you will not make money. It requires "a deal of want of conscience," as the Irishman said, to run a good hotel well.

Mounseer Ben-jingo and his accomplices, I'm afraid, didn't much care about anything but success. It was an old saying of his that nothing succeeded like it.

After a terrific deal of talking, and writing, and lawyers' papers flying about, and writs all made out ready to serve, and bailiffs in swarms collected for action (a small body of them, in defiance of all the rules and precedents of the management, being brought from the Hindoo Inn to Malta Court, to help the Queen's Head watchmen), Blood-and-Iron, seeing that things were getting very uncomfortable, not to say dangerous, resolved to put a stop to it. He invited the other managers to his hotel to talk affairs over, and at length, after considerable growling, and not a

little swearing and a pretty free exchange of anything but compliments, Gortchy and Ben-jingo announced that they had arranged to put the whole of the new contract between Fezzy and Monsieur Alick before the meeting and abide by the results. Immense was the delight in the Queen's Head. It was called "a great *moral* victory!" This seemed to imply that it was not in any sense a *material* one. The conference was held in the great Berlin dining-room.

Small as all this fuss may look to the Reader, it cost the Queen's Head a lot of money. You can't even begin to go to law now-a-days without expense, and solicitors are greedy and stick it on. Poor Staffy had a hard time of it, borrowing money to meet the bills, for the hotel didn't pay as it used to do under the old management, though the expenditure was much heavier. And there was worse to come.





IV.

He said that old Blood-and-Iron, seeing that if things went on as they were going there would be a general hubbub, and great loss of trade to all the hotels, put his foot down and swore that some arrangement should

be come to. He urged Monsieur Alick to give way to Mounseer Ben-jingo, saying to him, with a nod and a wink—

“ Oh, you know he’s only posing. It’s his way. Give him rope enough and he’ll hang himself. You might as well lay the agreement you made with Old Fezzy, ‘ in its integrity,’ as Ben-jingo says, before the meeting. ‘ Twon’t really matter in the long run, you know. Blow dignity!”

Monsieur Alick, who was exceedingly loth to knock under, was at length advised by Gortchy to consent; and Blood-and-Iron issued an invitation to “ a social meeting at the Berlin parlour, Imperial Eagle Tavern, dinner on the table at five o’clock. The favour of an answer is requested.”

All the guests accepted, and the Greek tavern-keeper and a small Armenian pot-shop waiter put in an appearance unasked, and were rather snubbed, though they afterwards got some of the leavings in the scullery.

Mounseer Ben-jingo, instead of sending a lawyer, resolved to go himself, and went to the entertainment in great state. The best carriage in the hotel, with footmen in velvet plush livery, came round to the front door and drove him over to the Black Eagle. He was accompanied by Master Salsify, and quite a crowd cheered them off, mostly potboys. Mounseer responded with one of his most effective bows. Never was there a head-waiter so thoroughly alive to his own worth and abilities. Everybody said it was magnificent. Crowds turned out to look at him along the way. It quite turned Ben-jingo’s head.

But when people hurrahed and talked of a great “ moral” victory, they did not know what Ben-jingo and Salsify knew as they drove along. It will be remembered Mounseer Ben-jingo and Master Salsify had told all the world that they insisted on free and open discussion, in the great

meeting of the hotel managers, of all business of general interest. "No secret agreements!" they cried, and they actually at one time charged Churny, the Imperial Bear agent, with having in his pocket a secret contract with Old Fezzy. It made the Queen's Head folks wild to think of it. This high "moral" game of Mounseer Ben-jingo's was the thing which had struck everybody with admiration.

But what was the truth? Why, Mounseer Ben-jingo, when he went out to dinner that night, followed with all this applause for his pluck and gallantry and cleverness and regard for principle, carried in his pocket *two secret agreements*, one with Old Fezzy to counterwork Alick, and one with Alick to square him at the meeting!

They hadn't been sitting two hours at dinner when a bootblack in Master Salsify's department let the cat out of the bag and produced a copy of one of the surreptitious contracts. Off went messengers to the Berlin dining-room with the news. The assembled guests stroked their beards.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! But Mounseer Ben-jingo was quite equal to the occasion.

"This," he said grandly to his friends, "this—er—is—er—what you may call—er—diplomacy."

"And a devilish business it is!" said Big Bill when he heard it. "The truth is he has been playing the game of bounce, and been afraid to carry it through. And so he has secretly arranged with Monsieur Alick to pretend to give way, when in reality he has done nothing of the sort."

And certainly when the terms of the agreement with Monsieur Alick were read over, it was clear enough, as everybody said, that Alick had got the kernel and left the shell to Mounseer Ben-jingo.

However, with these little arrangements made in advance,

the dinner-party in the Berlin room did not pass off so badly. They managed to patch up an agreement, and signed it all round.

One part of the settlement was that the Roumelian Court should be still supervised by Old Fezzy and his agents, and the Balkan wall and its look-out chambers over the Bulgarian Court, which was now set up as a separate inn under independent management, should be occupied by Fezzy's people. This was put down in black and white in order that Mounseer Ben-jingo might go back and boast of it as his doing, though the truth was it was well known that the wall would never be occupied by Fezzy at all, and he never dared to occupy it after. This was very clever, no doubt, and enabled Ben-jingo and Salsify to chuckle to their friends ; but the Queen's Head never recovered from the scorn and laughter through all the rest of the hotels when this ridiculous little game was found out.

It was very late—indeed, broad daylight—before it was over, and back came Mounseer in the big carriage, looking fresh and perky as ever. His friends gathered on the steps and raised a great cheer. They helped him down : he was getting rather shaky.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “er—we've come to a settlement. It is all arranged. I bring you back an addition to our *menu*. It is—er—a new Imperial dish—*Petty pois aux lauriers*—er—a splendid dish, gentlemen.”

They all hurrahed as if they understood it.

“Wot is it the old man says he's brought back ?” cried an impudent potboy in a sharp clear voice.

“Oh !” said Bobby, who knew the languages, “he means *peas with laurels*. For my part I think they are more wholesome with mint !”



ALL the old ways of doing things in the inn were "improved upon" by Monsieur Ben. His theory was that it was absurd to let the world and the inmates know too much about the accounts and the business of the concern. His friends used to go about saying that every one should place

the utmost confidence in the *maître* and his subs. As one of them put it, "Shut your eyes and go it blind." This was old Weathercock's advice—one of the commissionaires, a regular gossip, who would side with anybody he happened to be with. A new and somewhat startling method of business was adopted with regard to the "Empress Hotel," the old Hindoo inn which Mounseer had renamed in such a highflying manner. The steady old servant who had been in charge when Mounseer took over the direction—a first-rate fellow at figures, and very sensible and trustworthy—did not altogether like the orders given him from time to time by the new manager, and told him so. He was sent about his business, of course. Mounseer Ben-jingo would never be crossed.

We spoke before of the suspicious moves of the Bear proprietor in the direction of the Hindoo Court, in Kokand alley. Now he went up Badakshan passage, crossed a large common called Turkestan, very bleak, and with a good many of what are called the dangerous classes about. Close to the Hindoo Court, now the Empress Hotel, was a little pothouse of extremely bad character, the Afghan Arms, where an old publican named Ali carried on a poor trade, mostly, I believe, among thieves and garotters. Mounseer fixed his eyes on this place. He was afraid Alick might get hold of it. Dismissing the director of the Empress, he sent out a young fellow, one of his own friends, Master Litton, who was pretty good at drawing up ornamental *menus*, but not fit for much else, to take his place, secretly instructing him to try and buy old Ali over, and to get him in any case to agree to accept a waiter from the Empress to help him to conduct his business, but really to spy out what was done in the Afghan bar.

The new man was like a new broom, but did not sweep clean. He soon swept up a dust, however. Ali one night, having allowed some people from the Bear Inn to put up at his premises, and no doubt having treated them very politely, was waylaid by emissaries, beaten, and finally killed, and a youth named Yakoob, who rushed out and offered to do anything Master Litton pleased, was put in possession. Some servants from the Empress occupied the stables and part of the house. This, no doubt, was very clever, but it was sadly like the sort of thing that Mounseer Ben-jingo's friends were always roasting Monsieur Alick for doing! Out in that suburb, you may guess, the police were not very numerous, and the Empress people could do pretty much as they liked without being interfered with. Indeed, if the truth were told, they went in for plunder; but Mounseer's highflown objections to "plundering and blundering" were confined to interfering with the privileges and perquisites of stingy and selfish people in the Queen's Head. Outside who cared? He was "pushing the business;" and, after all, isn't that the thing? A terrible punishment came though. The people of the Inn rose and murdered all the Empress Hotel servants, and the row thus begun went on with terrible and aggravating circumstances. Ben-jingo's management will never be forgotten so long as the Queen's Head Inn endures.

As if all this was not enough to give what the French call *éclat* (*Anglic*' clatter) to Ben-jingo's management, another hubbub broke out in the African Court! A poor old darkie of an independent character, noticing what greedy folks the Queen's Head people were, had carefully drilled his negro waiters to defend the premises. Another of Mounseer's myrmidons, who was half-waiter, half-missionary, so

they say, was in charge of the African Court. It was a long way off—a miserable little place, with a curious business and very mixed patronage. I believe there was every shade of colour represented among its inmates—from red ochre to Indian ink. Barty, the new manager there, rather noted for his goody-goody ideas and his red-hot temper, got into a row with this poor negro, and, without waiting to ask any one's leave, served a writ on him and went to work. It was the most shameful and disgusting business ever undertaken by the Queen's Head Inn management. Instead of dismissing Barty at once, and righting things, they swore at him and sent him assistance in money and a company of police, under a superintendent, a regular duffer, who got into a sad mess. The old negro caught the police napping and gave them a proper thrashing, and it was a long and expensive business to bring him to terms. They turned him out of the management and carried him off and shut him up in a room, with half-a-dozen wives—which was punishment enough, one should say, for all the sins in the calendar.

In fact, the Queen's Inn seemed to be at loggerheads with half the world. Lawsuits, altercations, rows, or, as the play-writers put it, "excursions, alarms," were the order of the day. Neither guests nor servants ever went to bed at night under Mounseer Ben-jingo's managership without wondering what was the next rumpus they would hear of in the morning. Expense! the expenses were awful. And Staffy went on borrowing money for them all the time. He daren't tell what he was spending.

His method of rendering accounts was delicious. He used to stand up in the bar at the beginning of the year and say he had a surplus of several thousand pounds. That

was true *as the books stood*, but when he spoke he had not sent for the accounts from some of the smaller agencies, and he had not taken in any estimates for money that was actually being spent by thousands. Then he would suddenly seem to have found this out, and say—

“Oh well, you know! It's all the same. We can pay next year. We'll borrow some.”

“Oh! but,” said Big Bill, whose accounts were always perfect, “supposing your business don't improve next year?”

“Then,” said Staffy, leaning on the bar and smiling blandly, “then, my dear Bill”—Staffy was always very chummy with Bill—“we'll postpone it to the next and borrow again.”

Bill's state of mind about this was awful. He did not think once—or twice—or thrice about it, but he denounced Staffy as next door to a burglar.

Staffy only chaffed in return, and said that, “as it happened, in money matters the existing management was peculiarly strong.”

However, it didn't appear so to the lookers-on, and if it was so the management kept the proof to themselves, for they allowed no one to look into the till or see the books.

But the worst of it was that for the first time in the history of the inn all these things were done without consulting the proprietors or letting them know anything about them until they were undertaken and could not be recalled. One must own, if they afterwards suffered for it, it was their own fault, and they deserved it. They should have known that you can't have a theatrical genius managing an inn without getting far more acting and declamation for your money than honest business or rapid profits.



VI.

THE old motto which used to flame in gold letters on a blue ribbon, on the sign of the old Queen's Head, was a strange one, and puzzled people a good deal. It was

HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE.

Its origin was peculiar and traditional, and the Queen's Head people had always treasured the story.

One of the far-back managers, a gallant sort of fellow, perhaps a little too fond of the ladies (which may sometimes be), was present at a dance in one of the ancient drawing-rooms, when a very pretty woman, noted for her modesty as well as her wit, dropped—well, dropped a garter. The manager, a man of very good manners and some humour, picked it up and presented it to her with a bow and these words that had stood so long on the renowned old sign, *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*

It became his motto, and the motto of all the managers and manageresses after him, and every one at the inn had come to attach to it a very pretty meaning. As he had wished the handsome lady nothing better than that her virtue should be ever sacred, not merely from rude assault, but bad design—that none should assail it even in thought—so, applied to the high ideal of the superlative and pure good name of the Queen's Head Inn, all connected therewith used to look up at that motto and think it expressive of the spirit that ought to animate every one that loved the old place and its ancient ways of freedom and good living. *Cursed be he, they used to translate it, who thinks a bad thought or conceives a bad design against the honesty of this old business;* and imbued with this spirit the management had flourished, and waiters worked with heart and loins, and guests and lodgers and all felt proud of the noble establishment and its honest name and fame.

But Monsieur Ben-jingo, with his new-fangled notions and his airs and conceit, thought he could improve on this “musty phrase,” as he one day called it, cocking up an eyeglass with a grand air to squint at it. Since he had

become *maître* he had affected the French language, as more befitting an “hotel” of the modern style. So he went on to his cronies—

“*Noos avong chanjee too sala! Eel fo retirey sa!*”

He pondered long what new phrase he should coin to supplant the well-loved motto.

In truth, the old motto was a bitter reflection on Mounseer Ben-jingo’s administration. The idea of a high spirit of truth and honesty in the management of the affairs of this splendid business had certainly, under his hand, become rather worn out. Every one knows how success is won by the new upstarts in trade now-a-days. They spend money very freely in advertising, plaster the walls with gaudy letters, stick up gorgeous signboards, and draw the world’s wonder by vulgar display. Of course the money for all this parade has to come out of the pockets of the buyers, who are getting a worse article at a higher price. Mounseer Ben-jingo, as we have seen, very early saw the advantage of this modern way of doing business. It didn’t require much wit or principle. He went in for keeping his customers so lively with his inside show, his active pushing outside tactics, and his quack advertisements, that for the moment they did not consider whether they were really any better off or getting value for their money. So that the old motto had ceased to have much value, except perhaps as a standing satirical protest against Mounseer Ben-jingo’s antics.

So he made up his mind to change the motto for one more adapted to his style of direction. He bided his time, and at the next free-and-easy in the *Gilt-hall* dining-room, when Staffy, with a bottle of port at his side and a short pipe in his mouth, and his hat over his eyes, was

muttering figures to himself, as if he were trying to straighten the bar-accounts, which he knew to be in frightful disorder : and Salsify was making violent efforts to keep his back stiff after all the lush he had had ; and the manager's confidential clerk, old Mr. Soft-corns, a highly-respectable and religious old gentleman, lay with his head on his arms on the table, not exactly in Chancery but in an attitude which might be of reflection or of worship ; and the jolly tradesmen, all smoking and drinking together, were in the highest state of jovial free-and-easiness, ready to listen to anything, Mounseer Ben-jingo, affectionately throwing his arms round the neck of the burly chairman, a well-known cheese-and-butterman, who had just proposed the *maître's* health and the success of the management, said—

“ Gentlemen! *Gen-lemen.* Yes, 'gree s'ow worshy friend ! Managemen's gr-great shuckshess ! Gr-gr-great shuckshess ! Un-presh-presh preshendedent shuckshess ! (*Great cheering from the tradesmen.*) Never wash sh-shush a shuck—shuck-hic-shuck-shess—hic !—

“ We'sh beat Yakoob she wild Afghan,
We'sh beat she mad Zulu :
We'sh kept she Turk on she Balkàn,
And done she Russian too !

(*Tremendous cheering and chorus,* “ And done she Russian too-dle-do—and done she Russian too.”)

“ All our law-shoots have been won. Gentlemen—shure you'll shupport she management. (“ *We will.*”) We'sh only deshirous to maintain she dig—dignity of shis mag-nifishent hotel (*Hooray !*) in a shtyle of Imp Imperial splendour. We mush exshtend on all sides—big bishness can't shtand shtill If shtand shtill (swaying to and fro on the chairman's neck)

mush—hic—fall down. Genlemen, beg proposh to you new motto—gentlemen—motto old gent manager Roman hotel two shousand years ago—shplendid motto. Lesh adopt it shis hotel—*Imp-Imperium et—hic—lib-libertas.* (*Great cheering.*) Wosh it mean? Means—bishness as you please—push yer trade where you can and no queslions asked. (*Roars of applause from all the tradesmen. Cries of “That’s it.”*) Genlemen, lash night—Monty read booksh—old Gr-Greek booksh—old fellow said, law gainsh per-perorashuns. Bad shings—per-perrashuns. Genlemen —shan’t perrorash.”

Here the speaker fell in an ecstasy of good-fellowship on the bosom of the chairman.

The next day Mounseer Ben-jingo, who was now altogether above touching a paintbrush with his own fine fingers, ordered a painter to mount to the old sign and paint out the motto. In a short time *Honi soit qui mal y pense* disappeared, and in its place flourished in large gilt letters the words

IMPERIUM ET LIBERTAS.

You may imagine the rage of Big Bill and all others who loved the old ways of the old inn, who regarded its honour, its good name, its future prosperity. They were for improvements, and always had been if they were really wanted and really added to the comforts and ease of management of the venerable business. But they went in for something substantial—something that profited—or something that lessened the charges while increasing the trade. All Ben-jingo’s flummery, which only added to cost and gave nothing in return but barren notoriety or actual losses, disgusted them, and, in truth, began to disgust all concerned. It was too hollow to last.

The guests were waking up to the real state of things,

and beginning to grumble loudly. I will only mention one little incident which shows how the tide was running.

When the new motto was finished and the steps taken away, a number of the waiters and servants and guests gathered to have a look at it.

“Rum goin’s on,” said the old boots, leering at the sign. “Long as I can remember the owld sign were up there, and no man thowt o’ laying a hand to it. It were a grand old sign in its day, it were. Many a time I’ve stood ‘ere, and seen Canning, he were a sharp gentleman, and a raal gentleman he was, and did business like a genelman, and not like a cadger, and old Peel, him as were manager when I fust come—and old Pam—you remember him, Jim, him as used to chew a straw and knock around so sharp about the stables?—rare ‘cute old boy he were—weren’t ‘un?—I’ve seen ‘em all lookin’ up to that sign as if they was a-prayin’ to it—they loved it so. But law! I say—look at ‘un now! Did ye ever see sich a bit o’ gilt gingerbread work? Wot’s it mean? Wot’s *Himperium et Libertas*? ”

“Blowed if I know,” says Jim, wiping his nose with the back of his hand. “He’s all-ways a-struttin’ an’ phrasin’ about now with them furrin languidges, while the business is a-goin’ to the devil with his fiddle-faddle. Whoy, I aint a-taken three sixpences in a day for months.”

“I know what it is,” cried a pert chambermaid, with fine smooth cheeks and a carnation colour, “I know—it’s *Himperance* and *Liberties*—that’s wot I say it is—and if Master Ben stays long where he is there won’t be a honest woman—nor man neither for that matter—about the place—that’s my idee—it is.”

“Year, year!” said the crowd.

And “Hear, hear!” say I.

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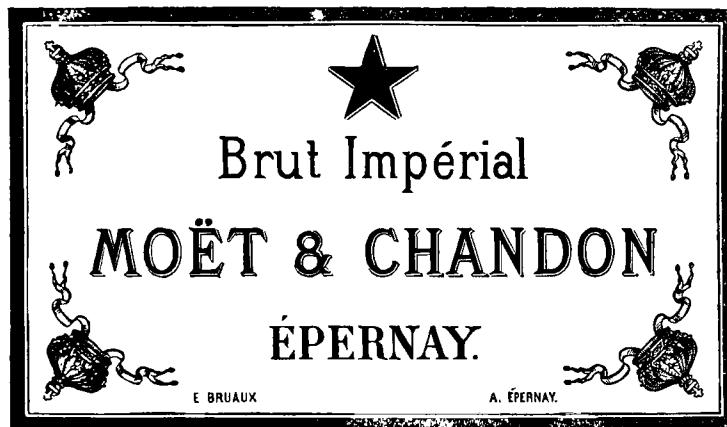
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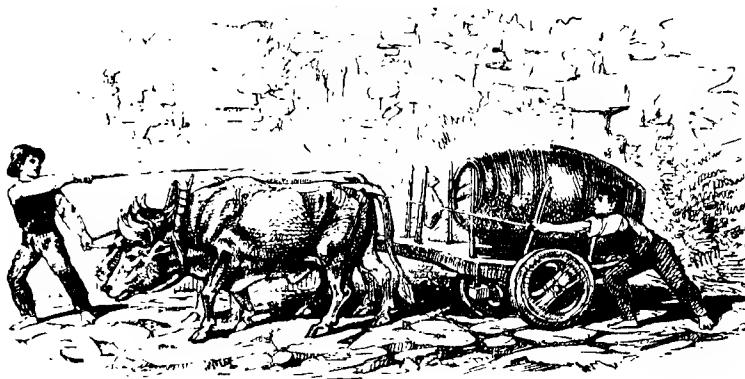
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